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SENECA PARK ZOO CERTIFIED SENSORY INCLUSIVE

First in Region Certified by KultureCity

October 7, 2020 - Monroe County Executive **Adam Bello** and Seneca Park Zoo officials announced today that Seneca Park Zoo has been certified Sensory Inclusive by KultureCity, a leading non-profit recognized nationwide for revolutionizing how organizations serve those with sensory needs.

The certification process entails staff and volunteers being trained in how to recognize and respond to guests with sensory needs, designation of quiet spaces and headphone zones, and the ability to offer guests sensory bags including noise-cancelling headphones, fidget tools and more.

"Individuals with sensory needs are a large and important part of our community, and this allows our Zoo to be an even more welcoming, safe place to many." commented **County Executive Bello**. *"I'm so proud that the Zoo is the first organization in our region to achieve this innovative certification."*

Sensory sensitivities and challenges are often experienced by individuals with autism, dementia, PTSD, and other conditions. One in six individuals have a sensory need, or invisible disability, according to KultureCity. One of the major barriers for these individuals is sensitivity to over-stimulation and noise.

"It's scientifically proven that being in nature, near wildlife can have calming health benefits," stated **Seneca Park Zoo Society President and CEO Pamela Reed Sanchez**. *"But we know that the Zoo environment can be over-stimulating for those with sensory needs. We are thrilled to have received this certification, so we can serve these guests with the most comfortable and accommodating Zoo experience possible. We look forward to partnering with AutismUp on programming specific for this audience."*

Uma Srivastava, COO, KultureCity commented, *“Our communities are what shapes our lives and to know that Seneca Park Zoo is willing to go the extra mile to ensure that everyone, no matter their ability, is included in their community is amazing.”*

AutismUp, who serves over 2500 families in the region, applauded the Zoo on achieving this certification.

“Sensory processing can be debilitating and overwhelming for this population, often leading to isolation and inability to take part in community activities. The fact that the Zoo recognizes this and is committed to working with AutismUp on welcoming families and training staff to ensure the environment is inclusive to all, is commendable and exciting for our families. As a community, we are fortunate to have the Seneca Park Zoo’s commitment to all families.” said **Sarah Milko, Executive Director for AutismUp.**

Guests can learn more and access social stories by downloading the KultureCity app, or by visiting senecaparkzoo.org/accessibility.

The Zoo is open daily. Timed tickets are required and are available at senecaparkzoo.org.

Internationally, and in our own backyard, Seneca Park Zoo plays a key role in species survival. Chartered as an educational institution in 1957 by New York State, the Seneca Park Zoo Society plays an integral role in supporting Monroe County, the owners and operators of the Zoo. Together, we are working to bring animals back from the brink of extinction.